

THE BOTTOM LINE OF SILENCE: POLITICAL COLLECTIVE EFFICACY, ISSUE INVOLVEMENT, AND WILLINGNESS TO EXPRESSION.

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ABSTRACT

The draft of “Family Diversity” bill, which allows same-sex marriage, civil solidarity pact and cohabitation contract for cohabitants, had caused social confrontation, masses of passion, and opinions suppression in Taiwan last year. The opponents, who called themselves as the silent majority, pledged to withstand the strong minority—all of these conditions are in line with the prompt from Noelle-Neumann’s advice to examine the spiral of silence theory (SST). To test the SST, the study consulted the background of this theory to confirm the fitness of our issue, and then 400 participants were surveyed for this study.

The results show: (1) to researcher’s surprise, current opinion congruency is associated positively with willingness to express, the “constraining silencing effect” named by Chen (2011) may exist on Facebook (2) the outcome-relevant involvement is successfully predicted to be associated positively with willingness to express, while value-relevant involvement is not; (3) For supporters, Political Collective Efficacy is associated positively with their willingness to express.

KEYWORDS: Spiral of Silence Theory, Political Collective Efficacy, Issue Involvement, Willingness to Express

INTRODUCTION

The freedom of speech is the cornerstone of democratic society due to its function of deliberation. However, the fact is usually frustrating, in addition to the government, there are many factors that hinder our society from a full discussion: people of passion, biased media ..., which let individuals immersed in scorching hot, sticky atmosphere, and thus make them keep silent—such an intense environment might have been rare in history, but it had shown twice at least in 20th Century, both of the settings had broken into the life of Noelle-Neumann (Noelle E. Neumann) before she had proposed the "spiral of silence theory" (Simpson, 1996).

Unusual is that the marketplace of ideas in Taiwan had been enduring "economic crisis" last year: From the end of August 2013, the Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights (TAPCPR) began promoting its draft of family diversity amendment. Their series of actions set off a boom of opinion expressions, the opponents of 150,000, who were led by “the Hope Family TW” and other groups, also parading on Ketagalan Boulevard to defend their own stand on Nov. 30.

In addition to former studies, there are two more reasons that the diversity-family issue is very close to the theoretical background of SST:

- **Masses of Passion:** In order to promote their views, the pros and cons on both sides launched several processions, even occurred many incidents of confrontation against each other in the Nov. 30.

- **Opinions Suppression:** In the heated debate, individuals were attacked easily because of their own position. For example, the Taiwanese singer, Amber Kuo, was severely criticized by netizens after she posted cynical queries about the draft. (China Times, 2013.12.05) On the other hand, the Hope Family TW publicly expressed that they would like to challenge the "strong minority" bravely before the procession; they symbolically took off their masks, demanding government paid attention to the silent majority. (Liberty Times, 2013.12.1)

However, for the one who has sharp mind or a good understanding of this topic, he/she will find that some contradictory phenomenon: If the opponents had talked about "Family Diversity" issue under such a heavy pressure, why did they dare to hold the banner high in front of the media, as well as their opponents?

To address this problem, researchers have proposed two to think about: (1) Since the issue involves questions of values and beliefs, people may think that this issue has been vital and relevant, it must consider the likely impact of Issue Involvement; (2) former studies of Francis Lee initially confirmed in oriental culture, Political Collective Efficacy (PCE) may be involved in the political campaigns the psychological motivation (Lee, 2006, 2010). In the march on Nov. 30, 2013, opponents were mobilized by their own church or group. It seems to worth exploring whether they are no longer afraid of isolation because of being united or not.

Spiral of Silence & Opinion Expression

In simple terms, the process of Spiral of Silence Theory is (1) if Individuals perceive unfavorable opinions weather (that the mass media & reference group shape), they will have the psychological driving force to fear of isolation; (2) then individual remain silent due to this force; (3) the phenomenon of silence leads to increased gap between proportions of the major/minor group of opinion; (4) Finally, the elated party gets much extensive support. In recent years, the basic assumption of the SST has been supported in nine countries, including Taiwan. (Matthes, Hayes, Rojas, Shen, Min, & Dylko, 2010)

Quasi-Statistical Sense

Being based on her experience of opinion polls, Noelle Neumann concluded that most people have an objective to evaluate the level of strength of opinion from all the parties, though we cannot accurately assess the current climate of public opinion since we evaluate the level of strength of opinion from others through media. On another side, Noelle Neumann clarified that personal quasi-statistical functional statistics is inherently impossible to be very precise. (Noelle Neumann, 1993: 216)

Climate of Opinion

After quasi-statistical functional "statistics", we get to the topic of "climate of opinion," which Noelle-Neumann described as follows:

"Climate totally surrounds the individual from the outside; he cannot escape from it. Yet it is simultaneously there within us, exercising the strongest influence on our sense of well-being. The spiral of silence is a reaction to changes in the climate of opinion." (Noelle Neumann, 1993: 78)

There are many ways to estimate the climate of opinion. As to the issue of same-sex marriage, Liu and Fahmy (2009), as well as Chen and Ho and Sim (2013), discuss whether the present / future climate of opinion affects individual

on his/her willingness to express. If the predictions between opinion congruency and willingness to express were successfully proved, it would be provided an opportunity for us to test the mediating role of fear of isolation between them.

Fear of Isolation

Neuwirth and Frederick and Mayo (2007) described that fear of isolation as: “people do so by factoring in expectations about likely outcomes based on (a) their past history of interactions (reflected in traits), (b) the fear engendered by the controversy surrounding the issue itself, and (c) more immediate situational factors associated with the particular and unique circumstances of speaking out.” Although it’s complete enough to conceptualize the fear of isolation, more studies of SST designed different scenarios to test it.

In fact, just because the conceptual framework is not complete, the spiral of silence theory has great potential on the contrary. Thus Moscovici (1991) thought the SST as the “dynamic center” of opinion research.

Willingness to Express

Chen and Ho and Sim (2013) stressed that it is important to differentiate between different dimensions of opinion expression in the spiral of silence. They focus on two specific types of engagement strategies in their study: expressing individuals’ own opinion and offering a rationale for their own opinion. Ross (2007) figured out that asking participants to speak out in actual situations could provide a more complete interpretation of Noelle-Neumann’s original conceptualization, while McCann and Schneider (2009) said opinion expression in their paper is equivalent to willingness to express opinion.

“Willingness to express” and “express opinions” is difficult to distinguish from each other, but whatever be understood in accordance with the Chinese or English word meaning, the former refers to the subject's attitude, while the latter refers to the subject's approximate action or behavior.

This study will be conducted with survey, so only attitude can be observed rather than real action; no matter what individuals say, or no matter what individuals do, they just keep silent if they were mute. Therefore in this study, the willingness to express is defined as “a personal opinion based on their perceived climate, expressed his/her stand in the social context.”

Spiral of Silence Theory on the Internet

Most studies of the SST on the Internet supported the basic assumptions itself, (Lin, 2010; Liu and Fahmy, 2009; Xiao, 2010), while Chen and Ho and Sim (2013) indicated current and future opinion congruency did not display significant relationships with individuals’ willingness to speak out, as well as fear of isolation.

In addition, Zuercher (2008) reminds researchers, should be noted when spiral of silence theory is applied to the network: (1) cue-filtered network scenarios may allow minorities to rise more willingness to express than realistic society; (2) Subsequently, given enough time, individuals should be able to recognize extremist opinions delivered through CMC due to the development of social cues.

According to Zuercher, since Facebook and social reality are inextricably linked, expression willingness of minorities is almost as the same as the reality. On the other hand, opponents of family diversity draft advocate that they are the silent majority. Therefore this study would like to try to examine whether their rhetoric reflects social fact or not, as well as the correction between fear of isolation and willingness to express:

H1: Opinion congruency will be negatively predicted individuals' willingness to express their opinion (1) in reality scenes/(2) on Facebook.

H2: Fear of isolation will be negatively predicted with individuals' willingness to express their opinion (1) in reality scenes/(2) on Facebook.

Issue Involvement

Issue involvement was developed as control variables in the Elaboration Likelihood Model by Petty and Cacioppo (1979), in order to avoid affecting on the theoretical results because of individual differences in the degree of interest in issues.

Some researchers, such as (Jung, 2011), have followed their paces to define issue involvement as "the extent to which the attitudinal issue under consideration is of personal importance" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979, p. 1915); In another, several studies made the concept of issue involvement briefer, like Yun and Nah and McLeod (2008), and Eagly and Chaiken (1993) defined it as personal relevance of the issue.

In fact, issue involvement can be better classified according to why one specific issue is important for us, being basis on Johnson and Eagly (1989), Chia and Cenite (2012) claimed that involvement, in general, refers to "a motivational state induced by an association between an activated attitude and the self-concept". They distinguished the implication of issue involvement into 3 orientations:

First, the value-relevant involvement is associated with the motivation to defend an existing position or important self-defining values (Johnson and Eagly, 1989). For those highly involved, few positions on such issues are found acceptable and few produce neither positive nor negative evaluations. (Cho and Boster, 2005).

The outcome-relevant involvement refers to a person's perceived likelihood with which the issue under consideration may have future consequences for the self (Johnson and Eagly, 1989). On one hand, involvement facilitates attitude change when messages are rife with strong, logical arguments; on the other hand, involvement attenuates attitude change when the audience is presented with less compelling arguments and non-issue-relevant cues. (Cho and Boster, 2005).

Finally, the impression-relevant involvement is the concern with public perception of the self. (Cho and Boster, 2005) In order to avoid repeating the same measurement variables, the study use only the "value-relevant involvement" and "outcome-relevant involvement" as our definition of issue involvement.

In past studies, issue involvement is sometimes associated with willingness to express. Salmon and Neuwirth (1990) may be the earliest study finding the relationship between issue involvement and willingness to express, while they studied on abortion policy. Moy and Domke and Stamm (2001) found the same deduction acceptable when they studied perspectives on affirmative action, as well as Louis and Duck and Terry and Lalonde (2010). Lin (2010), Flora Chan (2011) and Chang (2010) had also found that issue involvement influence individuals on their "lurking" (remaining silently) behavior or speaking out their own opinion.

In order to understand more about the relationship between issue involvement and willingness to express, the third and fourth hypothesis of this study was set up to:

H3: Value-relevant involvement was predicted to be associated positively with willingness to express (1) in reality scenes/ (2) on Facebook.

H4: Outcome-relevant involvement was predicted to be associated positively with willingness to express (1) in reality scenes / (2) on Facebook.

Political Collective Efficacy

Political Collective Efficacy (PCE) is an associate concept of Collective Efficacy from Albert Bandura. Bandura (1982) proposed group efficacy to reflect a phenomenon that group members often expect to achieve a common goal together. In subsequent writings, Bandura (2000) pointed out that group political efficacy are not the sum of beliefs for individual members, but the emerging properties of community.

PCE exists among members of the group, lets them take action coordinately in accordance with the shared beliefs. The relationship between individual action and belief under social system will not separate from each other, which group political efficacy plays a similar function of the actions and beliefs, and affecting people strive for their own desired future dedication effort.

Lee (2006) used the PCE in public opinion research first. The study found the political efficacy of Hong Kong people is low, but their group efficacy is higher than American. Besides, their group efficacy was also associated with political participation indeed. The author then inferred the weak individual political efficacy in the collectivist societies (e.g. Hong Kong) can be "compensated" by the PCE, which forces people to participate in political affairs, mainly from groups rather than individuals. Chung (2011) named "political collective efficacy" as the variable formally, defining it as: perceptions of system responsiveness requires to collective demands for change. The research found that the PCE is relevant with political participation.

Since there are supporters and opponents of family diversity draft, in this study, PCE should be defined as the potential that individuals perceive their own group achieve their common goals, and society's ability to respond themselves.

H5: Political collective efficacy of supporters was predicted to be associated positively with willingness to express (1) in reality scenes / (2) on Facebook.

H6: Political collective efficacy of opponents was predicted to be associated positively with willingness to express (1) in reality scenes/ (2) on Facebook.

Other Variables

Finally, referring to Chen and Ho and Sim (2013), Liu and Fahmy (2009), which studied on the similar subject, and the phenomena that religious and LGBT groups are very active in this event (Chen, September 7, 2013; TAPCPR, September 3, 2013), the seventh and eighth hypotheses can be researched:

H7: Sexual Orientation will be related to willingness to express in reality scenes as well as on Facebook.

H8: Religious Belief will be related to willingness to express in reality scenes as well as on Facebook.

METHODS

I conducted an Internet survey of 400 Facebook users aged 12 years and older between 2 and 19 March 2014. Being in line with the research context, this study provided a questionnaire link to those who have Facebook accounts on (1) Facebook News fan group (such as Yahoo! News) (2) related opinion leaders' Facebook fan page (such as Amber Kuo) (3) their own opponents' Facebook club or fan page on Internet.

MEASURES

In order to ensure the result are not affected by their own personal characteristics, and thus it should be placed basic demographic variables in this questionnaire, including age ($M=27.20$ years, $SD=5.70$ years), gender (male: 50.25%, female= 49.75%), education level (University: 69.25%), and support/oppose the draft (support: 76.25%; oppose 23.75%) as control variables.

To measure willingness to express, respondents were asked to imagine that whether they reveal their own stand at (a) Facebook News fan group (such as Yahoo! News) (b) related opinion leaders Facebook fan page (c) their own opponents' Facebook club or fan page on Internet, and (d) hear a stranger on the bus or MRT chat (e) classroom / office premises (f) religious places. Express opinion was a three 5-point each item for online/offline settings (1: 'disagree', 5: 'agree'; $M=19.20$, $SD=9.11$, Cronbach's $\alpha=.824$ for all the six questions).

Current opinion congruency was developed in the same scenarios on Facebook and in reality scenes. Respondents were asked to indicate how their perceived degree of disagreement with themselves on the draft of Family Diversity, on a 5-point scale (1: 'disagree', 5: 'agree'; $M=12.50$, $SD=5.78$, Cronbach's $\alpha=.738$ for all the six questions).

Fear of isolation was measure with two items adapted from Liu and Fahmy (2009) on a 5-point scale (1: 'disagree', 5: 'agree'; $M=2.18$, $SD=1.10$, Cronbach's $\alpha=.738$ for all the six questions).

As to issue involvement, this study adapted a composite measure with five items for (1) the value-relevant involvement (2) outcome-relevant involvement from Cho and Boster (2005), and Quick and Stephenson (2007) on the 5-point Likert scale ($M=16.08/12.92$, $SD=16.89/8.936$, Cronbach's $\alpha=.722/.912$ for value/outcome relevant items).

The 5-point Likert scale of political collective efficacy is from Lee (2006), Chung (2011), and Chan and Guo (2013). Respondents were asked how do they believe that if they were on the streets or petition to support/oppose family diversity draft, will have an impact/be better on society after differentiated their stances on the draft. ($M=6.98/6.70$, $SD=2.80/2.64$, Cronbach's $\alpha=.853/.590$ for support/oppose items)

Sexual Orientation & Religious Belief was designed with 4 and 9 options for each at first. After recoding the two variables, sexual orientation was coded as: 0=Heterosexual, 1=Lesbian, Gay, and others; religious belief was coded as: 0=practice no religion, 1= have religious belief.

RESULTS

According to its policy, Facebook is a less cue-filtered cyberspace on the Internet. However, the result of H1-2 proved that current opinion congruency is associated positively with willingness to express, and H1-1, H2-1, H2-2 have no significant effect on it.

As to the two concepts of issue involvement, H4-1 and H4-2 were supported instead of H3-1 and H3-2. Although we debate the questions of value in this issue and few people will be benefit from the draft. (See Table 1& Table 2)

Just like the study predicted, H5-1 and H5-2 were supported. Those supporters of the amendment who have high political collective efficacy will also have more willingness to express.

Nonetheless, H6-1 and H6-2 didn't pass the examination of this study; H7 and H8 were consistent in the result of that people are not always eager to express opinions to protect their basic stance, as well as H3-1 and H3-2.

DISCUSSIONS

First, we have to further interpret the fail for proving the hypotheses of SST. The study only found the opinion congruency will be positively predicted individuals' willingness to express their opinion on Facebook. In fact, a similar result was found and interpreted in Taiwan. Chen (2011) concluded that the negative impact of opinion congruency will be "suppressed" by the level of personal rational behavior intention. It was called "constraining silencing effect". The study (N=101) said people were affected by inner conscience to correct improper behavior and to support ethical rhetoric. Since the deliberation of family diversity draft is a high value-related issue about the definition of marriage and family, people may accuse each other intensely to order out of chaos.

Despite this, it was the outcome-relevant involvement that was successes to predict willingness to express, not the value-relevant involvement. Therefore my assumption should be further examined by adding new variables, like Attitudes in theory of planned behavior, and the degree of hatred of outdated/new opinion for respondents. On the other side, the study found political collective efficacy of supporters is associated positive to willingness to express. The reason that the same hypothesis of opponents was failed could attribute to the definition of political collective efficacy itself, or the origin rhetoric for aggressive actors in the questionnaire could be misunderstood by opponents in Chinese.

Finally, sexual orientation & religious belief were unsuccessful to predict the willingness to express, May the marketplace of ideas in Taiwan was so prosperous that citizens can't avoid themselves getting involved.

Table 1: Online Expression

| Title | β | R ² (Standardized) |
|---|---------|-------------------------------|
| Block 1: control measures | | |
| Age | .047 | |
| Gender (male=0, female=1) | -.008 | |
| Education | -.125** | |
| With religious belief (without=0, with=1) | -.024 | |
| Sexual Orientation (Heterosexuals=0, Others=1) | .042 | |
| Support or Oppose (Support =0, Oppose=1) | .003 | |
| Incremental R ² | | .025 |
| Block 2: predispositions | | |
| value-relevant involvement | .044 | |
| outcome-relevant involvement | .103** | |
| Political Collective Efficacy (supporter) | .074* | |
| Political Collective Efficacy (opponent) | -.002 | |
| Incremental R ² (%) | | .042 |

Table 1: Contd.,

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|-------------|
| Block 3: opinion congruency | | |
| Current opinion congruency | .109** | |
| Incremental R ² | | .053 |
| Block 4: fear of isolation | | |
| fear of isolation | -.035 | |
| Incremental R ² | | .054 |
| Total R2 (%) | | 17.4 |

Notes: *p <.05, **p <.01. Cell entries for blocks 1~4 are final standardized regression coefficients.

Table 2: Offline Expression

| Title | β | R²(Standardized) |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Block 1: control measures | | |
| Age | -.045 | .003 |
| Gender (male=0, female=1) | -.053 | .012 |
| Education | -.135** | .014 |
| With religious belief (without=0, with=1) | -.027 | .012 |
| Sexual Orientation (Heterosexuals=0, Others=1) | -.051 | .010 |
| Support or Oppose (Support =0, Oppose=1) | .041 | .069 |
| Incremental R ² | | .029 |
| Block 2: predispositions | | |
| value-relevant involvement | .051 | |
| outcome-relevant involvement | .099* | |
| Political Collective Efficacy (supporter) | .076* | |
| Political Collective Efficacy (opponent) | -.077 | |
| Incremental R ² (%) | | .050 |
| Block 3: opinion congruency | | |
| Current opinion congruency | .013 | |
| Incremental R ² | | .050 |
| Block 4: fear of isolation | | |
| fear of isolation | -.025 | |
| Incremental R ² | | .050 |
| Total R2 (%) | | 17.9 |

Notes: *p<.05, **p<.01. Cell entries for blocks 1~4 are final standardized regression coefficients.

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